

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-10

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R 091200Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8858

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

USSAG THAI

JCS WASHDC

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 545

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:MPOL, CB

SUBJECT: CURRENT THREAT TO THE MEKONG SUPPLY ROUTE

1. ONE OF THE MORE CRITICALLY SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE KHMER COMMUNISTS' DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE SINCE IT BEGAN ON JANUARY 1 HAS BEEN THEIR SEIZURE OF CONTROL OVER SIGNIFICANT PORTIONS OF THE MEKONG RIVER BETWEEN PHNOM PENH AND THE BORDER WITH SOUTH VIETNAM. THEY ARE NOW EXERTING HEAVY PRESSURE AGAINST THE KHMER GOVERNMENT NAVY BASE AT NEAK LUONG THIRTY KILOMETERS SOUTH OF PHNOM PENH, HAVE INTERDICTED A FIFTEEN TO TWENTY KILOMETER-LONG STRETCH OF RUOTE1 ON THE WEST BANK OF THE RIVER NORTH OF NEAK LUONG, AND HAVE ALSO DRIVEN NAVAL INFANTRY UNITS FROM FIVE POSITIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER SOUTH OF NEAK LUONG.

2. COMBINED GOVERNMENT GROUND, NAVAL AND AIR OPERATIONS ALONG THE MEKONG HAVE HERETOFORE ASSURED THE PASSAGE OF THE MEKONG RIVER CONVOYS.

THIS MADE POSSIBLE THE BUILD-UP IN PHNOM PENH PRIOR TO JANUARY 1 OF ADEQUATE STOCKS OF RICE, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, AMMUNITION AND OTHER SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR THE KHMER GOVERNMENT'S DE-

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FENSE EFFORT. THIS EARLIER BUILD-UP PERMITTED THE POST-

PONEMENT OF THE CONVOY WHICH HAD BEEN SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 5. IN OUR JUDGEMENT, HOWEVER, THE OUTSIDE DATE BEFORE WHICH IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE CONVOY BE RUN IS JANUARY 20. AS A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE AND BECAUSE OF THE DETERIORATION IN THE SECURITY SITUATION ALONG THE MEKONG, WE HAVE THEREFORE ARRANGED TO START THE AIR-LANDING AT POCHENTONG AIRFIELD OF AMMUNITION, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AND HIGH PRIORITY GENERAL CARGO FROM THAILAND BY C-130 AIRCRAFT OPERATED UNDER CONTRACT WITH BIRD AIR.

3. ALTHOUGH THE INTENSITY OF THE COMMUNIST ATTACK AGAINST PHNOM PENH HAS DIMINISHED DURING THE PAST TWENTY -FOUR HOURS, WE BELIEVE THAT THIS IS A PRELUDE TO A SECOND ROUND. RESUMPTION OF THE ATTACK AGAINST THE CAPITAL WILL POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR CURRENT PREPARATIONS TO BRING THE CONVOY UP THE MEKONG BY JANUARY 20. A MAJOR KHMER AIR FORCE EFFORT WILL BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE COVER FOR THE CONVOY, AND GROUND FORCES WILL HAVE TO BE LANDED AT KEY POINTS ALONG THE BANKS OF THE RIVER DURING THE PASSAGE OF THE CONVOY.

4. ON THE ENEMY SIDE, OUR INTELLIGENCE INDICATES THAT AS MANY AS SIX THOUSAND ENEMY TROOPS HAVE NOW BEEN PUT IN PLACE ALONG BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE BUILDING OR PREPARING TO BUILD BARRICADES ACROSS THE RIVER AND MAY BE PLANNING TO PLACE UNDERWATER MINES IN THE MAIN CHANNEL.

5. BOTH THE MOVEMENT OF NEXT CONVOY TO PHNOM PENH AS WELL AS THE LONGER-TERM REQUIREMENT OF RESTORING SECURITY ALONG THE MEKONG TO PREVIOUS LEVELS PRESENT SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR THE KHMER ARMED FORCES. KEEPING THE MEKONG OPEN ON A PERMANENT BASIS, HOWEVER, IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE CONTINUED DEFENSE OF THE COUNTRY.
DEAN

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